



Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

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To: Chair Bartlett and Members of House Judiciary.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY HB 171

Madame Chair and Honorable Members:

As the Executive Director of the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVRC), I urge your support for House Bill 171. MCVRC provides legal services for crime victims throughout Maryland and is the largest nonprofit of its kind in the country. An alarming share of our clients are impacted by gun-related offenses –drug related offenses, armed robberies, domestic violence incidents, first degree assaults and murders and we write on their behalf.

House Bill 171 should receive support from both sides of the political aisle. It will allow for a more serious penalties if a defendant possesses or uses a firearm while engaging in cannabis distribution. The Bill is focused on conduct that clearly threatens public safety and does not touch on the politically charged issue of gun ownership.

Each year, gun-related tragedies dominate the news, prompting elected officials to renew calls for stronger gun control laws. Maryland should take this decisive action to strengthen its approach to sentencing these gun-related offenses. House Bill 171 would allow the courts to sentence criminals more seriously if they have guns while engaging in the Possession with Intent to Distribute Cannabis and the Cultivation/Manufacture of Cannabis. Mixing any drug and firearms is a dangerous combination. If Maryland is serious about tough gun laws, Maryland needs to incarcerate those who use guns while committing other crimes. HB 171 closes a gap that needs to be closed after the change in the Cannabis statutes to misdemeanors.

Our advocates regularly hear from survivors who feel that current penalties do not reflect the gravity of the harm and ongoing fear they experience. Enhancing sentences for these gun-related offenses will be progress. Coupled with other investments in prevention and robust support services for victims Maryland can work towards restoring confidence in the justice system and improve community safety. To protect our communities, gun crimes need appropriately tough sentences that reflect the seriousness of the offense. HB 171 is an important step forward. Please prioritize the safety and dignity of our communities and support HB 171.

Sincerely,

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